



Heraldic Marker, 2011 Dan Gunn  
Wood, acrylic paint, mirrored acrylic and wire 68" x 24" x 24"

## Critic's Picks: Chicago

By Claudine Ise

Sept–Oct 2011

In many ways, the ebb and flow of art world activity parallels that of the traditional school year. Summers are the off-season, when many galleries cut their hours or hang up “gone fishing” signs for a few weeks of R&R. In September and October, everything ramps up again. In Chicago, art openings and gallery crawls enjoy especially high attendance around this time, because the cooler temperatures make for ideal walking weather.

Several upcoming solo shows stand out as among the most anticipated of the Windy City’s fall season. The work of Dan Gunn is getting maximal exposure this fall, with solo exhibitions at moniquemeloche gallery as well as at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago’s “UBS 12 x 12” series (which focuses on emerging Chicago artists) on view in September. Whether his works are free-standing or wall-hung, Gunn considers them all to be paintings. This assertion may be hard for viewers to process, particularly when confronted with three-dimensional objects, like Heraldic Marker (2011) or Multistable Picture Fable (2010), whose forms have more in common with a coat rack and 6 Chinese folding screen, respectively, than they do a traditional painting on canvas or board. Or do they? Despite their unusual appearance, Gunn’s painted constructions meet all the standard requirements we ask of “good painting.” For example, he is astonishingly adept at bringing materials as disparate as wood, satin ribbon, glitter, feathers, string and pretty much anything else you can imagine together in harmonious balance. Sometimes, Gunn even “paints” with what is already there, as in Trickster Mechanism No. 2, (2011), where a single peacock feather is juxtaposed with a painted wood panel, the feather’s royal blue “eye” echoing the whorls ingrained in the wood.



# Art in America



Dialog Equipment, 2011, Dan Gunn  
Blackboard, plywood, metallic paper and mixed mediums, 68" x 44"

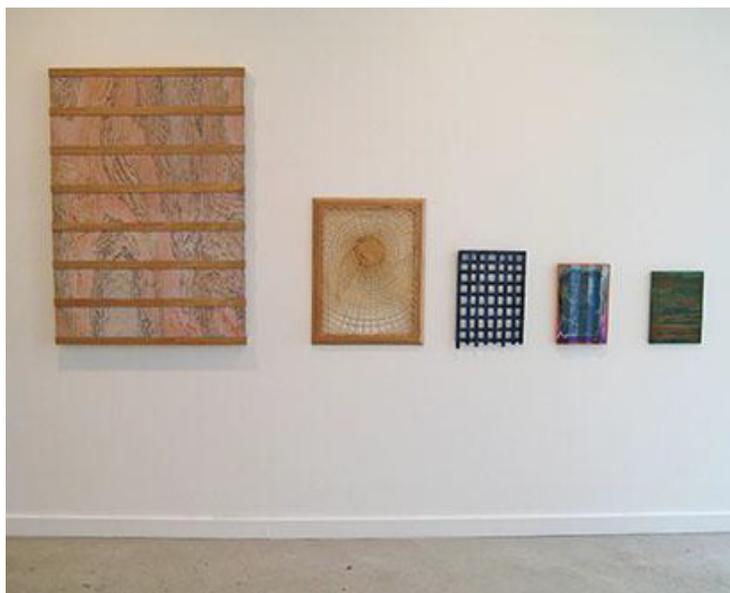
Monique Meloche and the  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
By Susan Snodgrass  
12/6/11

Chicago

Dan Gunn's hybrid constructions, whether freestanding or wall-mounted, retain their indebtedness to the history of abstract painting at the same time that they embrace other mediums and disciplines, including sculpture and design. Working across borders and with humble materials (plywood, foil paper, cork, beads), Gunn creates hybrid objects that share affinities with Richard Tuttle's early "Constructed Paintings." However, unlike Tuttle, whose interest lies in the dematerialization of the artwork, Gunn reasserts the primacy of objecthood, as was evinced in two compelling, concurrent solo shows. The 14 works on view at Monique Meloche (all 2011) combine artist-fabricated and found objects put to use as surfaces, supports and frames for traditional modes of painting and mark-making. Gunn's abstract vocabulary and meticulous sense of craft conflate notions of the readymade and the handmade, the intentional and the incidental, changing our perceptions of both painting and the everyday. Dialog Equipment, for example, is a discarded chalkboard framed with plywood and propped up against the wall on short, turned-wood table legs. The object's previous use as an educational tool plays against the artist's transformations: wooden slats covered with metallic paper create a series of reflective vertical "rips" that divide a ground of calligraphic, Twombly-esque gestures. In several works, Gunn applies acrylic and spray-paint to wood panels to create a stained effect. In one such work, Terrace, the artist enhances the wood's natural grain with colored pencil, highlighting each striation in unexpected hues, a process that alludes as much to Pattern and Decoration painting as it does to woodworking.

In the large, three-dimensional Patchwork Plateau, created specifically for the Museum of Contemporary Art, the artist constructs a kind of topographical painting, one that, as the title suggests, connects handcraft and landscape. A series of wood panels—some solid, others carved or woven—are pieced together to form an 8-foot-square horizontal assemblage that, elevated on 2-foot-tall legs, evokes a folding screen laid flat. Gunn embellishes the surfaces, all painted in varying shades of green, sometimes adding beads or other decorative elements. Throughout, traces of the artist's hand confront the work's seamless construction, presenting us with a domesticated object whose function is ambiguous, but whose affinity to painting remains satisfyingly clear.





Dan Gunn, 2011, installation view

Issue 144 January/February 2011

Jason Fomberg

Dan Gunn

Decorative patterns – on subway seats, office carpets and bedclothes – are often designed to disguise the residue of human presence. A pattern's matrix can quietly accept a stain as if it belongs there. The natural life of abstract motifs was a primary visual theme in Dan Gunn's solo exhibition at Monique Meloche Gallery. Gunn makes great use of lattices, weavings, zigzags, accordion folds, repeating lozenges, chevrons and vertical and horizontal bands as both the structure and form of his sculptures. He paints these sculptures by staining and distressing them with his marks.

Gunn's pleasant, mellow abstractions call up a golden age of Modernism, specifically Weimar-era Bauhaus, as if he were a late pupil of Paul Klee and Anni Albers. His sculptures demonstrate that the lessons of the Bauhaus are relevant today and can be learned anew, allowing geometry, chromatics and design to intersect easily without worry of genre contamination. *Dialog Equipment* (all works 2011) is a paint-scuffed blackboard, in a dark wood frame, propped on lathed table legs and leaning against the wall, exhaling after a long lecture. The work displays a lived-in quality, as if recovered from art history's secret attic.

Recent conversations about Gunn's objects have revolved around the expanded practice of conceptual painting. This association may be isolating, as many of Gunn's objects seem just a few hinges and planes away from becoming something

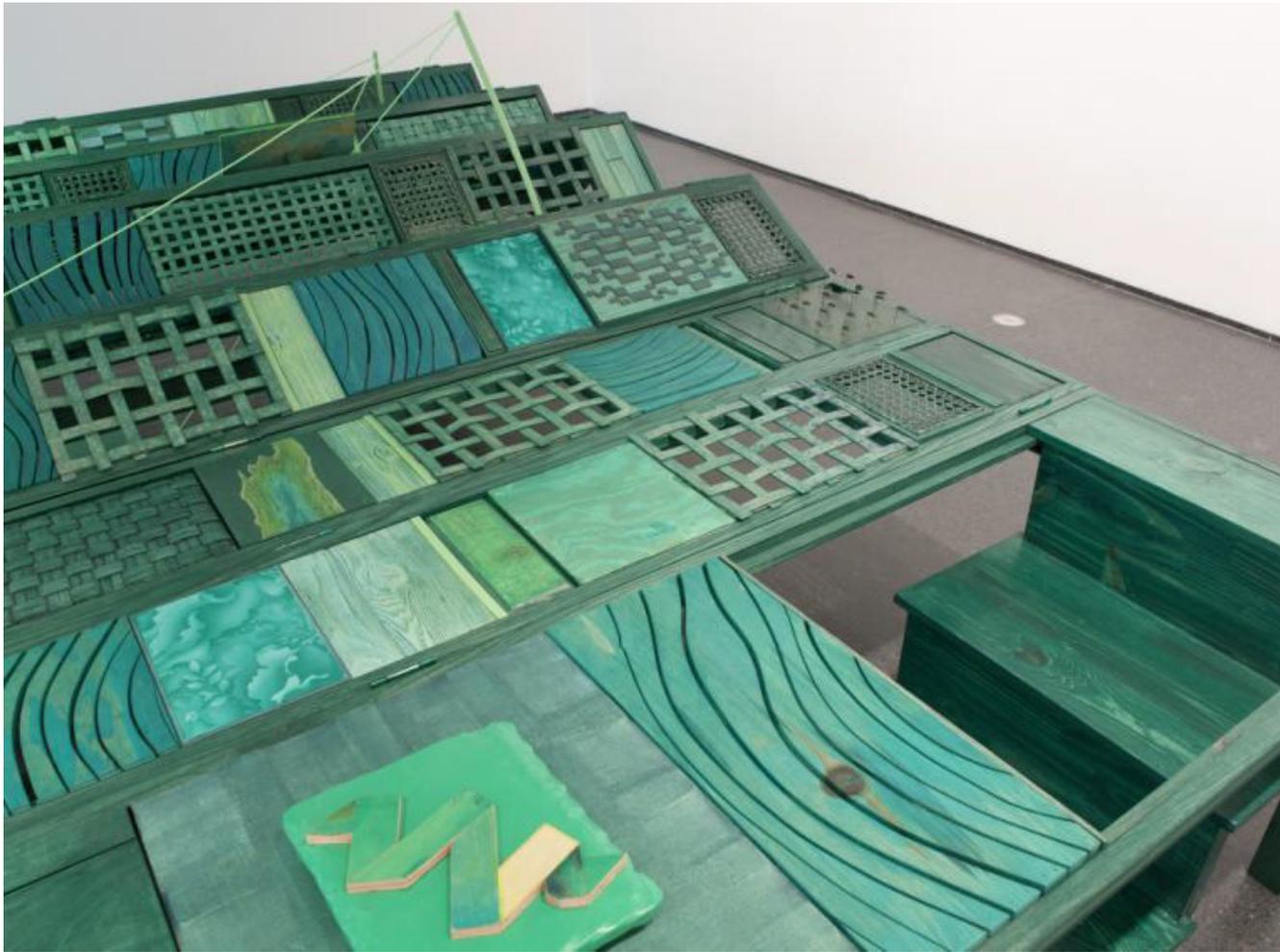
functional. Share this article: They comfortably reference textiles, interior architecture and handmade furniture. Twelve of the 14 works in the exhibition were placed on wooden supports, have wooden artist's frames, or are simply, integrally, wood sculpture and wood relief. Sometimes the woodgrain pattern is traced by colored pencil and acrylic, as are edges,

joins, and cuts, like a direct frottage, emanating a warm nostalgia, as if Gunn were refurbishing an old structure from salvaged memories. If there is a lineage of domestic-type objects digested by the subconscious, one can place Gunn following Richards Artschwager, Rezac and Tuttle.

Architectural Play Instrument No. 1 and No. 2 were two tall screens that each zigzagged, in eight switchbacks laced with latticed wood slats, near the gallery's entrance and across a large window. The screens were an attempt to delimit a special, private space. Many of the structural patterns in the show, including the folding screens, are innately contained and coiled, leading out of and meandering back into themselves. Words such as 'mystery' and 'enchantment' figure in to some of the object titles, suggesting deep interiority. A 2008 installation, *Territory*, is the most literal manifestation of this search to claim a corner of the world. With collaborator Karolina Gnatowski, Gunn built a soft fort within their home and turned a living room into shadowy forest, creating intimate fantasy spaces from which to daydream alternatives to the everyday, embodied by the domestic built environment. Since *Territory*, Gunn has made it a point to exhibit in several other domestic spaces that operate as exhibition venues, and his essay 'Notes on Apartment Culture' (2009) is a call to artists and apartment renters to continue the anti-institutional tradition of handmade gallery spaces within homes, despite, and because of, their mutability and fleetingness, like so many layers of a landlord's whitewash.

To this end, Gunn's objects symbolically reference material culture, a field that considers how objects made by craftsmen have meaningful social and personal implications. From the wood screens to the woven caning to the altered prefabricated oak panel, Gunn's objects evoke a sensate familiarity with culturally wedded materials, and they welcome anthropological inquiries in addition to art-historical ones. Like the artists of the Bauhaus, Gunn posits that abstraction is not disruptive to daily life. Rather, abstraction lets the world into itself, permeating previously assumed rigidities. A blue-tinted Perspex mobile, *Crystalline Curtain No. 3*, hung against the window like a transparent drape. It effectively pictured the passing world through itself, coloured it blue, prompting one to seek and see mystery in the familiar.





## Review: Dan Gunn/Museum of Contemporary Art

By Janina Ciezadlo

September 13, 2011

During the 1980s, artists who produced anxious or enigmatic objects gave up the responsibility to be serious, or at least they shed some of the trappings of the high seriousness characterized by Minimalism. Dan Gunn's "Patchwork Plateau," on view at the MCA, is an object resembling a room-dividing screen and is placed on its side. It has many attributes whose ambiguity could be unsettling, except that it is painted a cheerful shade of green. Many of the parts of "Patchwork Plateau"—the name must refer to its table-like orientation, although the geographical connotations linger—seem to be found and not found at the same time. Gunn uses pieces of wood in a patchwork over the folded sections of the screen, which look like they might come from chairs and wooden baskets. The sculpture's worked surface retains strong links to painting, despite the artist's all-or-nothing approach to color.

Each piece or section looks worked, that is, exhibits the traces of handwork, staining and painting, evoking overall some do-it-yourself project that became philosophical. Some sections are decorated with beads and others with shapes in cut-out wood. There is an inaccessible set of stairs at one end, an erstwhile functional element underscoring the lack of everyday usefulness of the plateau while an arrangement of ropes and pulleys connected to a green glass wind chime presides over the opposite side. The sculpture has all the elements of a porch or some domestic space, but they are reconfigured into a structure that manages to pose questions, "making strange," as Viktor Shklovsky would have it, but it seems familiar and welcoming nonetheless.





## Bringing painting into the third dimension

By Lauren Viera  
Tribune reporter

“Currently, it makes more sense to me to build a painting rather than have something blank that I will then fill in with marks.”

Meet Dan Gunn, the 30-year old artist whose unusual approach to painting has caught the attention of an increasing number of Chicago curators and gallery owners.

This month, Gunn is the focus of two solo shows — one at the Museum of Contemporary Art and another at Wicker Park’s Moniquemeloche Gallery — a rare occurrence for someone who is barely four years out of graduate school. Inclusion in a third exhibition this fall, a group show opening Thursday at Columbia College’s A+D Gallery, has kept Gunn busy this year producing more new work than ever.

“This is a totally new thing for me,” Gunn said recently over a cup of coffee in Logan Square, where he resides. Following a packed-to-the-gills panel discussion and temporary exhibition at Moniquemeloche last winter, Gunn was invited to join the gallery’s roster in the spring — almost simultaneous with an invitation from associate curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm to produce one of the MCA’s final shows in the long-running 12 x 12 New Artists/New Work series. Previously, Gunn’s solo forays have been limited to apartment galleries, including a stunning turn last fall at West Town’s Lloyd Dobler Gallery.

That site-specific installation, “Multistable Picture Fable,” was more sculpture than painting: bold stripes of paint, ribbon and fabric pinned like appendages to found-wood panels and salvaged scraps, all hinged together in a spiral winding over 9 feet of the gallery floor.

Though Gunn holds a painting degree from the School of the Art Institute, his work is increasingly three-dimensional, which he traces back to a postgrad job in Lookingglass Theatre’s scene shop.

“I was not a theater person so I’d never (previously) seen a stage up close,” Gunn said, “and (sets) are really not convincing at 3 or 4 feet away. ... But then when you’re sitting in the audience, with a certain kind of lighting on it, it’s seamless.” Lighting was already an obsession, Gunn said, explaining that he entered SAIC as a photo-realistic painter, but “at a certain point, I didn’t know what to paint anymore,” he said. “I just wanted to have light in my work.”

That’s evident in Gunn’s show at Moniquemeloche, especially, as it capitalizes on the gallery’s massive western-facing window. Gunn constructed a wooden screen that filters light through the window onto the rest of his work. The effect is homey, almost like the light one might find in a bedroom in the morning. By contrast, Gunn said his work at the MCA show has a more playful, less domestic vibe.

Both shows entail quite a bit of construction for someone who considers himself a painter.

“I’m slowly understanding what it means to make something in three dimensions,” Gunn said. He mentioned a recent conversation with a friend who studied trumpet performance at DePaul University, in which the two compared notes on artistic selfimprovement.

“It’s strange in that (as an artist), you kind of have to out-perform yourself from week to week,” Gunn said. “Nobody’s watching to make sure you’re getting better. You’re in the studio based on a commitment to personally get better at what you do.” So does Gunn out-perform himself? “Yeah, I do,” he said. “And that’s always nice, to look at older work and understand that it was good to do at the time, and I don’t want to devalue it, but it would be hard for me to make again.”





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## Dan Gunn: On Our Chicago Watchlist

Dan Gunn (b. 1980, USA)

A painter with a background in physics, Dan Gunn's work elicits an awareness of the viewer's own perception through the construction of objects that highlight the interconnected relationship between artist, viewer, artwork and the history of abstract images. Using the many languages of abstraction, such as patterns, lines, dots, and drips, Gunn builds a series of malleable surfaces that display different functional, aesthetic and cultural relationships between their constituent parts. Gunn's work makes no distinction between natural and synthetic, incorporating store-bought fabrics alongside paint, plywood, Plexiglas and reed caning; however, the artist's hand is ever-present. For Gunn abstraction is not used to reveal some underlying truth but rather as a way to notice the everyday structures that influence our relationship with pictures.

Prior to earning his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007, Dan Gunn received a Bachelor's degree

in Physics. His work has been reviewed in publications such as Artforum.com, Artslant.com, NewCity Chicago, TimeOut Chicago, and the Chicago Tribune. In 2011, Gunn had a solo exhibition at moniquemeloche Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago's UBS 12 X 12 New Artists New Work series. In 2010 he presented a solo exhibition Multistable Picture Fable at Lloyd Dobler Gallery in Chicago and was included in the Contemporary Art Council's group exhibition New Icon curated by Britton Bertran at Loyola University Museum of Art in Chicago.

Education: MFA, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2007. Post baccalaureate Certificate, Painting The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2005. B.S. Physics Wheaton College 2003.



# ARTWRIT

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Dan Gunn & Wendy White

By Britt Julious Volume IV

Fall 2010

After a decade during which audiences were seemingly inundated with work that didn't say much but was clever in a recognizable manner, it's comforting to realize that contemporary young artists are still creating works that engage the viewer rather than just exploit familiar pop culture references. Two years in to the worst economic decline since the Great Depression, the art world is in a state of flux. And for many young artists like Chicago's Dan Gunn, the fluctuating climate in contemporary art is a means to go back to ideas that make art a critical tool and one that engages with its public: a return to aesthetics, physicality, and the active courtship of the senses.

A return to these tenets should not indicate that Gunn's work is in any way stale. Instead, his work is multi-faceted and layered, something that continues to evolve for the viewer. In his first solo exhibition, *Multistable Picture Fable*, the artist employs a variety of materials to playfully challenge ingrained ideas about sculpture and painting. The work comprises a series of panels that are linked together. Each panel supports assorted objects, each inviting the viewer in. Surprises are to be had in the tiny crevices or behind the face of each work; the experience of viewing this work is one that is fragmented as the viewer navigates from the specific to the total, particular detail to general impression, piece to whole.

There is a physicality to Gunn's work that is alternately whimsical and challenging. Observing the titular piece as it spans across the main exhibition gallery requires time and patience, a demand seldom made on the contemporary art viewer. A white, subtle light reflects off the wall of the Lloyd Dobler Gallery. In the main gallery space, this light is the only aspect of Gunn's work that meets the conventions of painting exhibition — that is to say that the wall supports the exhibited work. Here the light is not a separate entity, but rather an offshoot of the larger, all-encompassing eponymous work, highlighting the varying cut-outs, additions and sculptural elements that make *Multistable Picture Fable* a stimulating visual feast. The panels vary in height and size, weaving a twisted curvature that connects and separates to alternately create one singular piece, or two separate pieces that speak to one another. One panel features a broken wooden chair on the back, another sports a window that affords the viewer a less likely angle. One must literally bend and twist and circle around the work in playful engagement to suspend the norms and pretenses that so typically obstruct the viewer's involvement with contemporary art.

Wendy White can't be contained. Her large scale works — part painting, part sculpture, part literary word play — are so enigmatic that the Andrew Rafacz gallery space, where her latest Chicago solo exhibition ran, seems small, downright tiny in comparison.

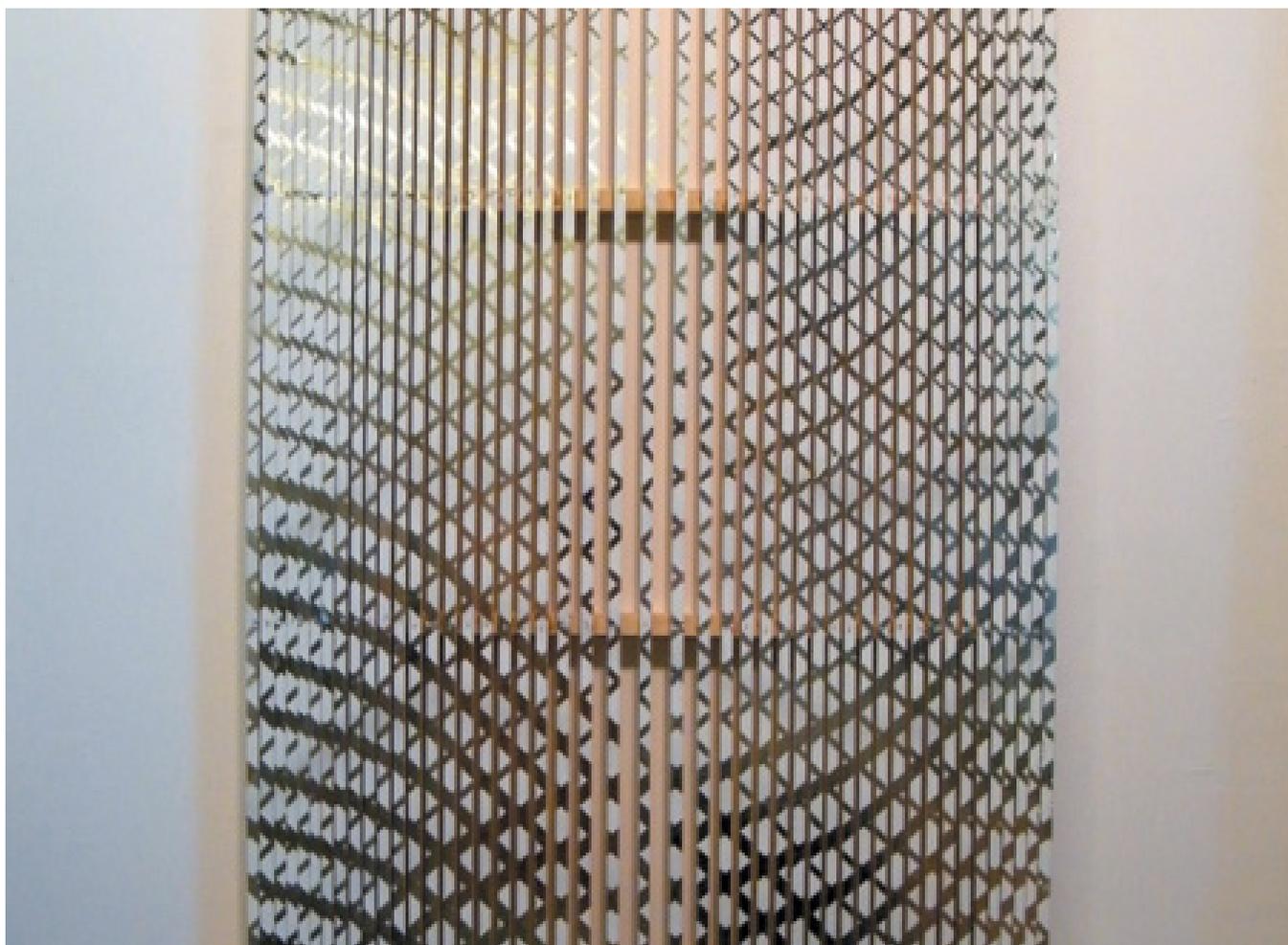
This is not a reflection of the gallery itself, but rather a testament to White's vision. Even the relatively small canvases from her latest work, constructed and manipulated in the same vein as the show-stopping first four works one encounters upon entering the gallery, take up space and demand active participation from the viewer.

*FRENCH CUTS* is not only an exploration of the practice of painting in the contemporary art world, it also serves a more direct purpose: the melding of various artistic disciplines (the literary, the visual) to make a more visceral and tangible experience for the viewer. White's works are immediate; This is best exemplified through her use of short phrases carved into the outer edges of her spray painted canvases. In the show's titular piece, the words 'FRENCH CUTS' are hewn from the right side of a canvas that takes up nearly one third of the gallery's walls. Though the viewer instantly recognizes the carved symbols as letters, it takes a few moments to recognize and form the phrase, and, from there, to synthesize the various aspects of the canvas into a total impression of the work.

White incorporates text with images as a means of elevating the traditional use of a canvas, but also, as a means of expanding on ideas and words through a more physical medium than the spoken and written word. White states that the words on her canvases express her thoughts, and that these time-cultivated ideas are made more real by their appearance on the canvas. She addresses the limitation of speaking and writing by employing text in a painterly and sculptural way, granting the abstract a strong physical presence.

Examining the relationships between the literary and the visual, sculpture and painting, is not what makes White's work so distinct; It is the means by which she conducts these experiments — her playful choice of materials — that makes *FRENCH CUTS* a step forward in terms of responding to the work of other artists, such as Frank Stella who pioneered the shaped canvas. These works use "lesser materials" such as Day-Glo spray paint, a choice that heightens their immediacy. The transposition of street to gallery makes the works pop against the space's minimalist aesthetic. White connects the world of the gallery, the world outside and her own internal world via her use of materials and confessional pronouncements before a larger audience. By exploring the physical properties of text and typography, and treating the words as malleable, sculptural objects, her canvases tread a fine line between abstract form and conceptual point-blankness while still eliciting a visceral reaction in the viewer: one of recognition. The ideas that White espouses through the textual aspects of her canvases are things that the viewer can identify with, and though the medium is unlike the ways in which one would normally communicate — vibrating the vocal chords or putting pen to paper — the thought that shapes the canvas is relatable. If it all seems somewhat familiar, that is the point.





Gunn, *Mystery of the Rectangle No. 6*, 2010.

## Dan Gunn at Lloyd Dobler Gallery

By Candice Weber

Published: September 29, 2010

A disappointing sense of nostalgia and lack of critical inquiry have pervaded this year's local painting exhibitions, such as Columbia College's "Let There Be Geo," making Dan Gunn's self-aware reassessment of the medium most welcome. Unlike many Chicago artists, Gunn simultaneously makes a case for painting's relevancy and acknowledges its ambiguous role in 21st-century art.

This show's titular piece spirals across Lloyd Dobler's floor as a chain of paintings of varying heights, connected with tiny brass hinges. Gunn applies different materials, colors and surfaces to each panel: One resembles a latticed gate spray-painted green; another, a towering white picket fence with a small window cut out. Gauzy emerald-green fabric stretches taut over a third's wooden frame, and a fourth incorporates crumpled tinfoil. All are done in an unassuming DIY style, which reminds viewers these paintings are three-dimensional objects.

Gunn has toyed with the line between 2-D picture and 3-D object for the past three years, leaning previous works against the wall. His new piece *Falling Starfield* extends a long, thin finger upward from the rectangular bounds of its frame. *Multistable Picture Fable* allows viewers to engage it in physical space, recalling the human scale of much late-1960s Minimalist sculpture.

When you step into the hallway outside the gallery, your eyes instantly register *Multistable's* echo in the strips of wood paneling that follow the spiral staircase out into the street. The best part of Gunn's new work is the way his panels seem to pass motifs among each other like a hidden code, pulling patterns and materials from the outside world.





Dan Gunn, installation view at Monique Meloche Gallery's booth at EXPO Chicago, Courtesy of Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago

### Artadia announces 2013 Expo Chicago Award Winner

Chicago, IL—Artadia is delighted to announce that Dan Gunn is the winner of the 2013 EXPO Chicago Award. Gunn will receive an unrestricted \$2,500 cash award for his presentation at Monique Meloche Gallery's booth at EXPO Chicago. The award is generously funded by Artadia Founder and Board President Christopher E. Vroom. Juror Nora Burnett Abrams, Associate Curator of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver walked through the fair, to determine the award winner from a pool of 95 Chicago-based artists whose work was exhibited at EXPO. Said Burnett Abrams, "Dan Gunn explores the tropes and props of staging in a playful and yet conceptually rigorous way that considers the difference between fact and fiction. He is a painter who uses neither paint nor canvas, but with freshness and exuberance, his work asks us to rethink the core ideas of painting, including color and illusionism."

Artadia Founder and Board President Christopher E. Vroom, say of Artadia's collaboration with EXPO: "Artadia is proud to have been a part of Chicago's vibrant cultural community ever since we launched our first awards here 12 years ago. Tony Karman and his team at EXPO Chicago have created one of the world's premier art fairs, in the process showcasing the city's amazing artists and cultural institutions. We're delighted to further our mission to support artists directly and to give Chicago's artists greater visibility at the fair through the Artadia/Expo Chicago Award."

Dan Gunn will join the Artadia family and receive all lifetime privileges of the Artadia awardees, including access to Artadia's national network, the option to participate in Artadia programs, such as the organization's New York Residency program, its professional services, publications and exhibitions program, and will be included in Artadia materials and website. Gunn received his MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BA in Physics from Wheaton College in Illinois. In 2012, he attended The Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. His work has been shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Loyola University Museum of Art, Chicago amongst other institutions and galleries.

### About Artadia: The Fund for Art and Dialogue

Artadia supports visual artists with unrestricted financial awards and fosters connections to a network of opportunities. We recognize artistic excellence in cities throughout the US and introduce local communities to the international art conversation. Artadia rotates award cycles through an ever-expanding set of cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and San Francisco, with a base in New York. Started in 1997 by Christopher Vroom, Artadia's base of support now includes private foundations, a national Board of Directors, a National Council, a Contemporary Council, and City Council members who are active in supporting the core of creative culture: the individual artist.

EXPO CHICAGO, the International Exposition of Contemporary and Modern Art, presents over 125 leading international galleries at Festival Hall at Navy Pier. These exceptional galleries represent 17 different countries and 36 different cities, offering a broad spectrum of modern and contemporary artwork. Building on the success of the exposition's inaugural year, EXPO CHICAGO/2013 will ensure Chicago's place as an annual international fair destination.

For information about Artadia, contact: Risa Puleo, Program Director, [risa@artadia.org](mailto:risa@artadia.org); 212-727-2233.

